

## **Vermont ranks in top 10 states for disability employment**

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Last year, more than 1,700 Vermonters with disabilities entered the workforce, propelling the Green Mountain State to join the ranks of the top states with the best employment rates for people with disabilities. Part of a nationwide trend of job growth for people with disabilities, Vermont stood out for a dramatic increase in its overall disability employment, now ranking sixth in the nation. The newly published 2018 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium shows Vermont has a 47.2 disability employment rate. That number is up from only 39.6 percent employment for Vermonters with disabilities.

To put that in a larger perspective, there are 47,113 working-age (18-64) Vermonters with disabilities. Out of that number, 22,234 have jobs. Nationally, the disability employment rate of all Americans with disabilities is only 37 percent. What that means is that Vermont consistently outperforms other, bigger states like California and Texas.

The Governor's Committee on Employment for People with Disabilities has helped to implement key policy initiatives. In September 2018, the Committee presented multiple "Spirit of the ADA Awards" to inclusive employers and community providers for their hard work getting more people with disabilities into the workforce. In February 2019, the Chair of the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities emphasized the crucial link between identity and employment. "All of us through our work have made friends, felt productive, and created an identity. We are just looking for the same for people with disabilities, to have that opportunity to make employment a big part of their lives."

Likewise, the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living has won awards for its commitment to affordability as well as access.

Vermont is also home to engaged self-advocate groups such as Green Mountain Self-Advocates (GMSA) and advocacy organizations such as Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights.

Beyond Vermont, how is the workforce changing for people with disabilities? What is driving these changes? The answer is simple. According to Vincenzo Piscopo of the Coca-Cola Company: "People with disabilities bring a unique skill set that it is very valuable for companies." He went on to add, "As it relates to employment and competitiveness in the workplace, we have to stop thinking of disability as a liability and start thinking of it as an asset."

As more companies hire employees with disabilities, conversations are shifting to focus on inclusion. "Disability inclusion is no longer about automatic doors, curb cuts, ramps, and legislation," says Jim Sinocchi, Head of the Office of Disability Inclusion at JP Morgan Chase. "Today, the new era of disability inclusion is about "assimilation" - hiring professionals with disabilities into the robust culture of the firm."